

MEETING A CHALLENGE

The artists join the writers in a concurrent congress in defense of their craft. Affirming the creative spirit . . . Joy Davidman takes a gander at the "quickies."

UNITING with the writers in defense of culture, the progressive artists of the country meet this week at the Hotel Commodore (June 6, 7, and 8) in a Congress of American Artists, under the joint auspices of the United American Artists, CIO, and the American Artists Congress. The ominous character of the hour is clearly understood by those more than one hundred artists who have signed the call: "In this grave hour, mindful of our responsibility to the art of our time and conscious of the danger that increasingly threatens both our heritage of freedom and our growing democratic culture, we issue this call. . . . Today the fascist threat has come full circle. In a traditionally free and liberty loving America, fascism comes in the name of anti-fascism. All the enemies of progress suddenly

become defenders of democracy. Our liberties are destroyed to defend liberty and the policies to which our people are committed by their government, in the name of peace, border ever closer on overt war."

The call continues: "We believe that the defense of America begins not with steps towards war and dictatorship but with the defense of our basic liberties, standards of living, and cultural opportunities. Because we know that our work as free artists is indissolubly linked with continuing peace and the dominance in American life of democratic principles, we call our fellow artists to this congress to consider the following questions:

"1. What can artists do to oppose the high-pressure drive towards war and the increasing use of fascist solutions for the problems facing the American people?

"2. What can be done to expand and make permanent the government art programs, stimulate the private market and provide more opportunities for artists to work at their profession?

"3. How can we aid the development of a genuine cultural interchange between the peoples of the Americas?

"4. How can we preserve the widespread community interest of the past decade and further develop the new audiences that have played so important a role in the renaissance of American culture?" Around this broad statement of principle, the Congress of American Artists has built its program.

The artists are holding closed sessions June 7 and 8, joining with the writers in a panel Sunday afternoon on the subject, "Art and Society." The three main panels for dis-

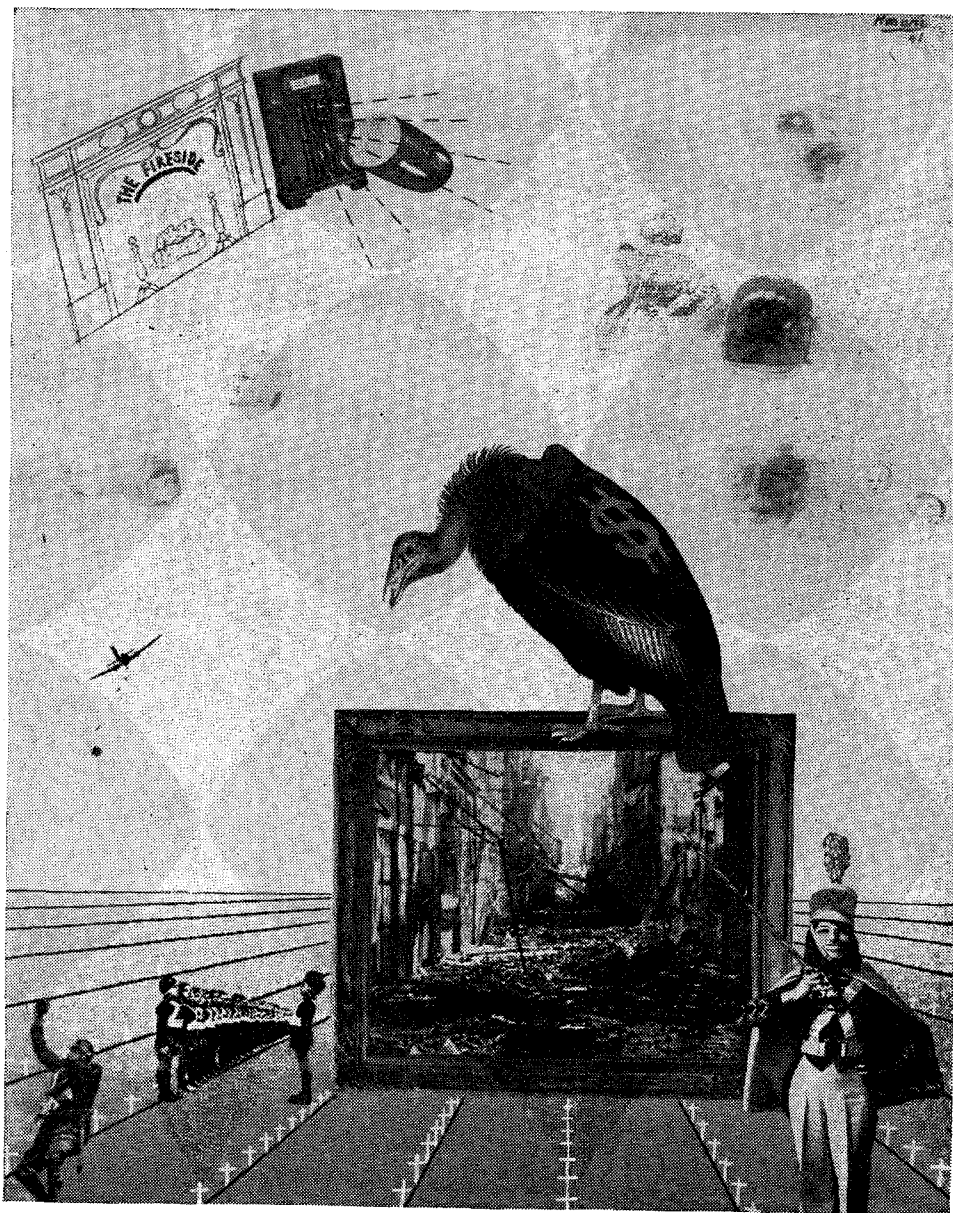


CONGRESS EXHIBITION

(Right) WAR
a collage by
Hananiah Ha-
rari

(Left) 1940
by Herbert
Kallem, in
polychromed
plaster

Below, WPA
ART CLASS by
Sid Gotcliffe



cussion by the artists are: Saturday morning—"Freedom of Expression in Art," with Harry Gottlieb as chairman, Elizabeth McCausland discussing "The Effect of the Art Market on Freedom of Expression"; Chet La More, "Government Patronage and Freedom of Expression"; Louis Lozowick, "A Fascist World and Freedom of Expression"; and Paul Rosenberg, "The Problems of the Refugee Artist." Saturday afternoon—"Criticism and Education in Art," with Bernard Myers as chairman, Jerome Klein discussing "Art Criticism in a Changing World"; Minna Harkavy, "Art Education for Artists"; and Lou Block, "Art Education for the Public." Sunday morning—"Economic Status of American Artists," with H. Glintenkamp as chairman, Daniel Koerner discussing "WPA Art Projects"; Robert Cronbach, "Section of Fine Arts and Other Government Activities"; Harry Sternberg, "The Artist in Private Industry"; and Morris Neuwirth, "New Horizons in Private Industry."

From the discussion at these panels and from the business sessions, a program of action will be evolved by means of which artists may be enabled to work more effectively for the broad objectives outlined in the call. An immediate cause for congratulation, as the Congress opens, is that crisis has brought writers and artists together in a unity apparently not possible before. Even closer collaboration between writers and artists is to be desired, and steps toward this end no doubt will be taken at the Congress.

An urgent problem confronting artists is the plight of their fellows who are refugees from wartorn countries. The case of Picasso has been headline news. This sixty-year-old leader of modern painting is being terrorized by the Nazis in occupied Paris. Picasso is but one of many artists across the Atlantic who are suffering. Today there are considerable numbers of artists interned in Canada, having been sent there from England. In France, many anti-fascist artists are open to persecution perhaps even greater than that leveled at Picasso, whose international reputation to a measure protects him. Who will fight the cause of these victims of brutality and terrorization except their fellow-artists? To meet this problem, a committee for refugee artists is to be formed.

A tangible demonstration of the abhorrence in which artists hold war and all its creatures is the anti-war exhibition being held during the Congress. Despite short notice, about sixty painters, sculptors, graphic artists, and photographers are exhibiting work. Even in these hours of crisis, the creative spirit reaches out for that which alone endows life with meaning, passionate faith in the significance and value of human thought and endeavor. Artists are bound also to reflect the spirit of the hour; their work today is sober, if unterrified. The grays and the blacks rule in these tragic transitional times. In these times, also, the freedom to work is stolen from artists, even as civil liberties are stolen from too many citizens. What artists cry out for is freedom to live

peaceably and happily, to do the best work they can, and to make an immortal affirmation of faith in life.

LYND WARD.

Neptune's Pets

The slippery quickies are still with us—and so is Mr. Mature.

THERE'S a hole in the bottom of the sea. Far out in the beautiful blue ocean there is a five-mile depth you could drown the Alps in. It's too far down for the slithery octopus and the slimy giant squid, and no submarines have ever explored it. Into that black pit no sunlight ever comes. But if you could ever get to the floor of that abyss, dear reader, you would find eight Hollywood studios planted in the ooze, hard at work producing quickies. They like it there because it is the lowest they can get.

As no major pictures opened this week, your reviewer decided to visit the quickie houses, a thing she has not done since Boris Karloff abandoned bloodcurdlers for Broadway. Now a quickie, as we all know, is a film produced in about the time it takes a toadstool to sprout. Its budget is small, its cast usually incompetent, its direction desultory, and its script moldy. It exists for two reasons; the more respectable of them is the usefulness of the quickie as a training school for new directors and performers. But the other, the basic reason, is the double feature and block-booking. The double feature creates an opportunity for passing off junk in company with a more desirable film, and block-booking compels the exhibitor to accept all a company's junk in order to get its better films. Consequently there is no compulsion on the major companies to produce more than a few really entertaining films. For the rest of their product, anything goes.

It is, of course, true that fine films can be made on a hundred thousand dollars or less, with an unknown cast. Few of the great

French films cost any more than a Hollywood cops-and-robbers stinkeroo. Most of the money spent on the *Gone With the Wind* sort of thing is sheer waste anyhow, or at best merely buys real lace for the gown the heroine wears falling off the cliff. And such directors as Garson Kanin and more recently Preston Sturges have turned quickies into whirlwind successes. All this, however, does not alter the fact that most quickies come out of the hole in the bottom of the sea, and I will undertake to run you up a better film with Grandfather's old magic-lantern than Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer turns out in such an opus as, for instance, *Washington Murderdrama*.

Notice the title, first. In what frightful underground den did the fiendish producer sacrifice the virgin body of the English language upon his unholy altar, to think up that one? And (if you're foolish enough to go see it) notice the way in which all the tried-and-true elements have been mingled by the low cunning of some troglodyte. Boys (you can almost hear the producer say), this picture must have *everything* the bargain basement's got. We'll murder a blonde cutie. We'll reform a selfish wife. We'll cook up a newspaperman with a jutting jaw. We'll have a lovely young girl save her daddy from disgrace—I got it! We'll top everything off with some juicy war propaganda!

But, Mr. Mister (some yes-man dares to murmur), we gotta think about the box-office. You know the returns on *I Wanted Wings* ain't quite—

So what? says the producer. They don't like the propaganda, we'll jazz it up for them. We'll put in a night club scene—you know, a song-and-dance act, also some cute aerial photography, chorus girls arranged in a star pattern. Tell you what, we'll be original. We'll put a swimming pool in the night club, and we'll put the chorus in the swimming pool!

Mr. Mister (breathes Sammy Stooze reverently), you have made film history!

So the writers rush off to do the script, and two-and-a-quarter hours later the film opens on Broadway. There, folks, you have *Washington Murderdrama*. It is only necessary to add that the picture's one chance to be interesting is thrown away by having the murder committed in full view of the audience; you can't even wonder whodunit. Poor Frank Morgan, looking rather worn, wambles around in his hopeless part, and Ann Rutherford is the lovely young girl. She's a pretty terrible actress, full of coy wriggles, but she looks good in that company. The film's stalwart young men all talk through their noses in a hysterical staccato.

Then there is *Power Dive*. This one has airplanes. Then there is *Border Vigilantes*. This one has horses; and if you think I am going to waste any more of the language Shakespeare wrote in on either of them, you are probably the guy who believed every word of the President's speech.

By far the most entertaining thing that happened around here this week was not a film; it was the behavior of a repulsive young



VICTORIA HORNE AND RALPH MORRISON in a scene from "Zero Hour."